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Open for Business?

An historical, comparative study of public access to information about two controversial coastal developments in North-east Scotland



Image: RCAHMS



Image: *The Scotsman*

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Different Eras

Gas Terminal in 1970s

- **Little history of public participation in planning**
- **Environmental impact procedures not widely accepted**
- **Government secrecy the norm**
- **Before the World Wide Web**

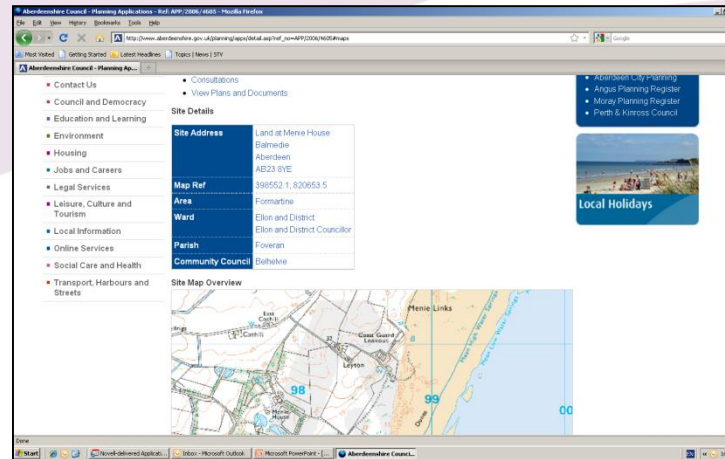
Golf Course in 21st Century

- **Public input in planning taken for granted**
- **EU legislation makes environmental impact assessments mandatory for major developments**
- **Open and transparent government?**
- **Planning information readily available online**



Main Aims of Study

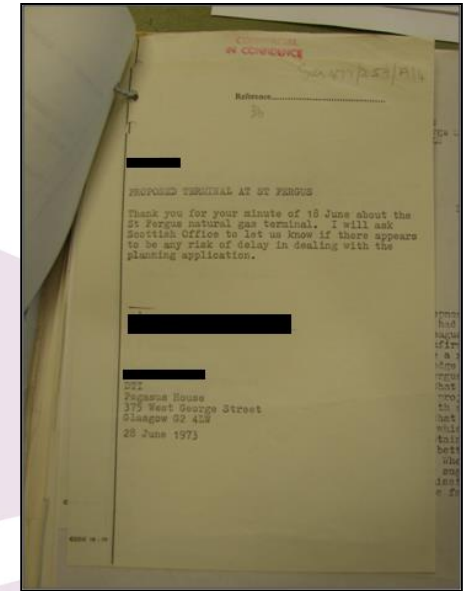
- To identify what information was made publicly available during each of the two projects; and
- to explore what impact this may have had on public engagement in the planning and decision-making processes in each case.



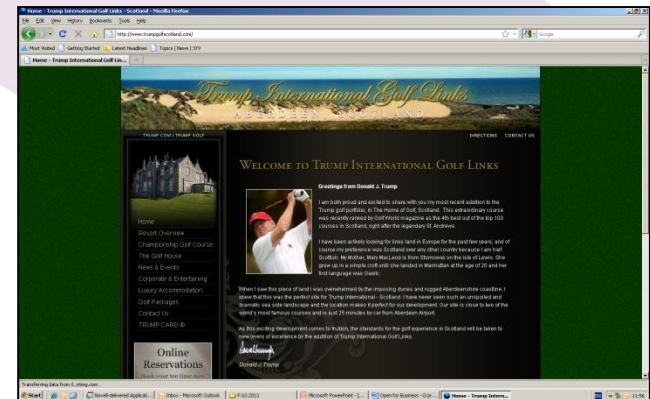
Methodology

Data collected from a range of primary and secondary sources, including:

- **Government records** – available online or in regional and national archives
- **Developers' records** – online and in institutional archives
- **Interest group records** – online, or in group or personal archives
- **Print press coverage** – at national, regional and local levels
- **Broadcast press coverage** – online and in institutional archives
- **Other secondary sources**
- **Interviews and correspondence with key individuals**



Source: National Archives POWE 29/879



Location of the Two Developments



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“Gas versus Geese”: the Terminal Development

- **Nov 1972: rumours in local press of some type of oil/gas development near Crimond**
- **27 Nov: BBC Scotland broke news of joint application, from Gas Council and Total Oil Marine, to build a gas terminal on a disused airfield at Crimond.**



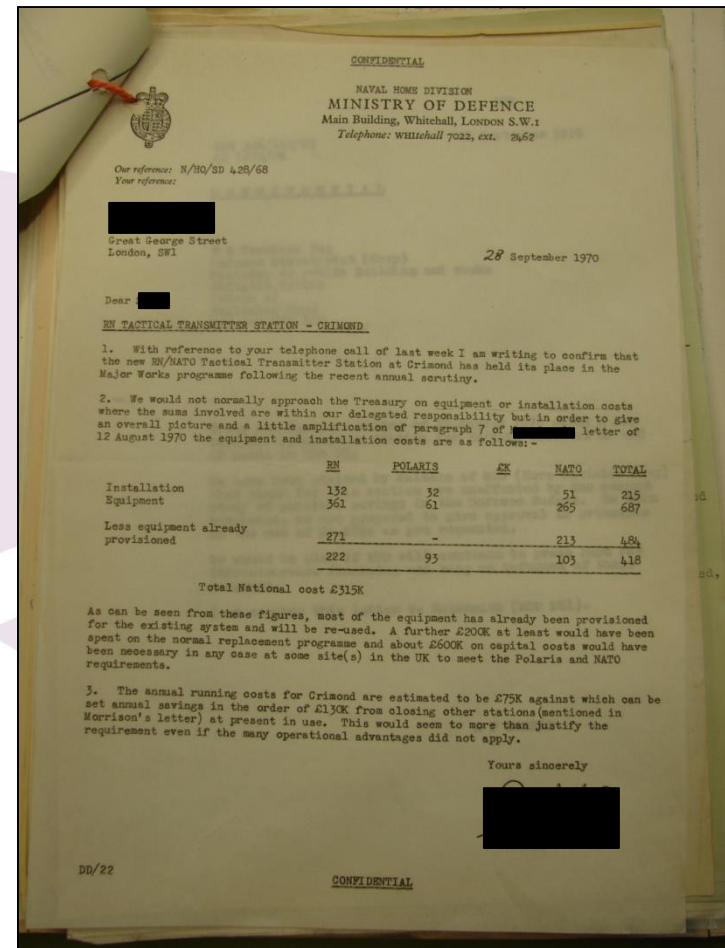
The Loch of Strathbeg

- **Britain's largest coastal dune lake**
- **A site of special scientific interest (SSSI), because of its wildlife, geology and limnology**
- **"...the common people who live thereabout, believe, and say it too, that all the birds in the world come there in winter" (*The Naturalist*, Nov 1854)**
- **RSPB were in the process of securing land around the loch for a nature reserve**



Planned MOD Radio Station on Crimond Airfield

- Ministry of Defence already had clearance to build a radio station on airfield site
- Building expected to start in 1973
- RSPB feared “an appalling holocaust” of birds flying into masts and wires
- MOD had already agreed to fix red lights on masts to try to prevent collisions



Source: National Archives T 225/4061



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Public 'Consultation' on Crimond Gas Terminal: Dec 1972

1 Dec: Council deferred decision to allow objectors to express opinion

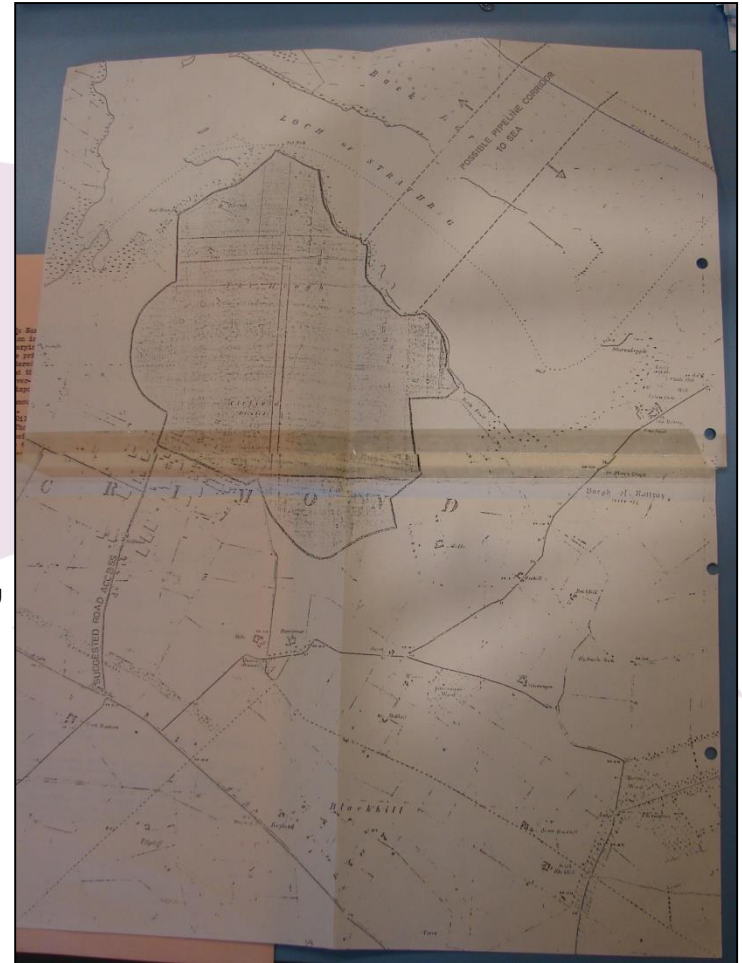
Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1969:

“adequate publicity”

“an opportunity of making representations”

“Outline planning permission was sought on the sketchiest of information” (Dunnet, 1974)

Within the 14-day period, the Council received a “record number” of objections

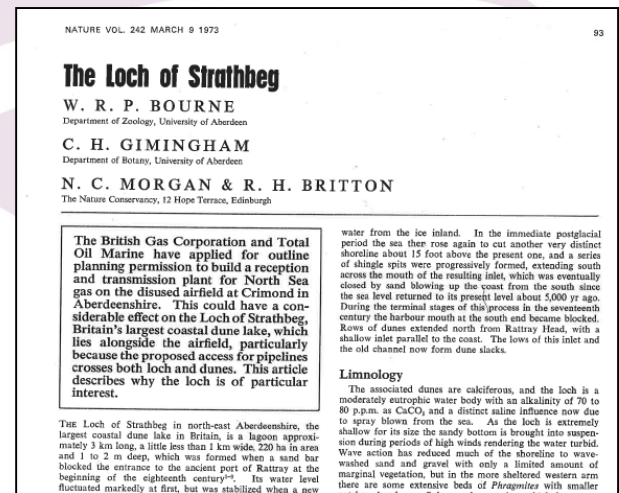


Source: Scottish Ornithologists' Club Archives



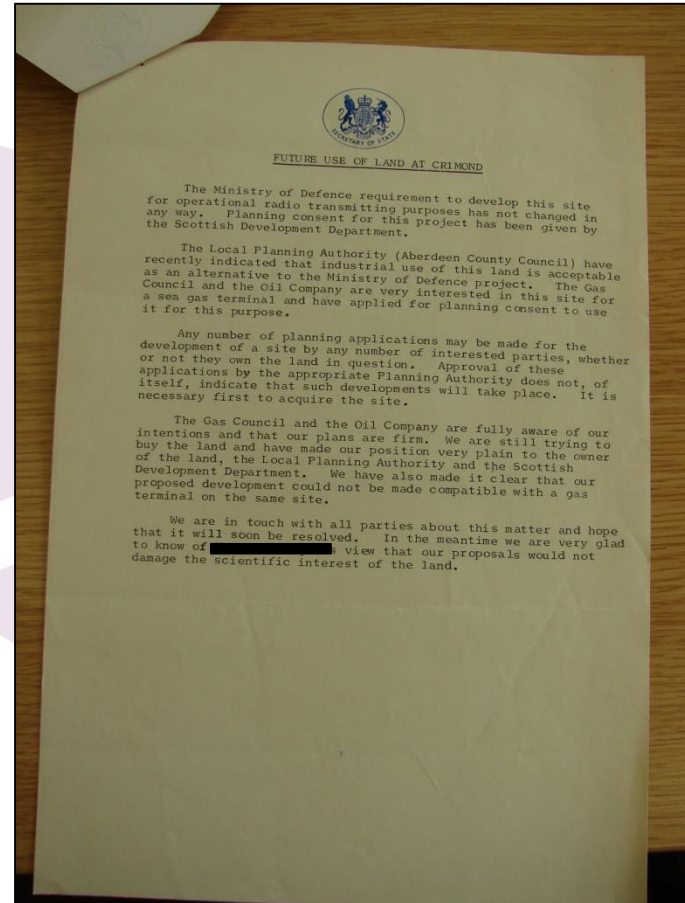
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- **Environmental Liaison Group came to play a crucial role in disseminating information and advice**



Meanwhile, in the ‘Corridors of Power’

- Civil servants aware a “major battle is going to brew up”
- MOD reluctant to use compulsory purchase powers in peacetime
- Secret meetings arranged with developers
- Established that the two projects could not be co-located for safety reasons
- Hoped that environmentalists would advise that the gas terminal move to another site – “confidential talk...keep his trap shut”
- Total revealed that not all of the N.E. coastline had been surveyed



Source: RSPB East Scotland Archives



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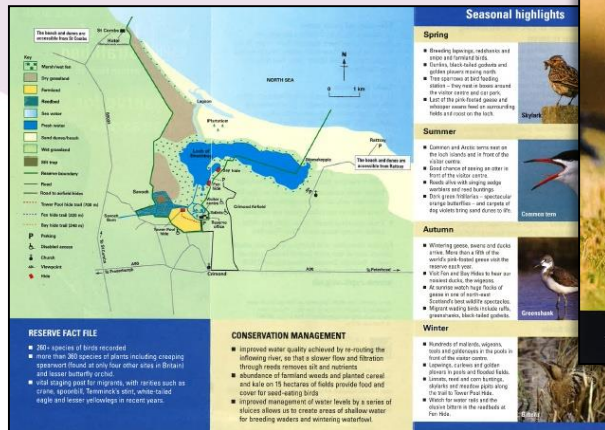
- **A less environmentally sensitive site**
- **But developers refused to concede victory to the environmentalists – only cited MOD's radio station plans**
- **Oct 1973: Planning permission for St Fergus granted, subject to conditions**



A Happy Ending?



Radio station opened July 1978

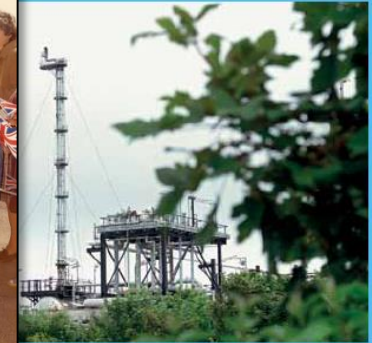


RSPB reserve opened June 1977



Image: Aberdeen University Library

Gas terminal opened May 1978



“Birds or Birdies?": the Trump Golf Resort

- **Jan 2006: rumours about plans for a major leisure development in Aberdeenshire**
- **Mar 2006: Trump announces plans to build a £300m golf resort at Menie – “the greatest golf course in the world”**
- **Immediately welcomed by business and tourist groups – “biggest single impact since oil”**
- **But concerns expressed by environmental groups about impact on dune system (a SSSI)**
- **Trump criticises existing proposals for a nearby offshore wind farm**

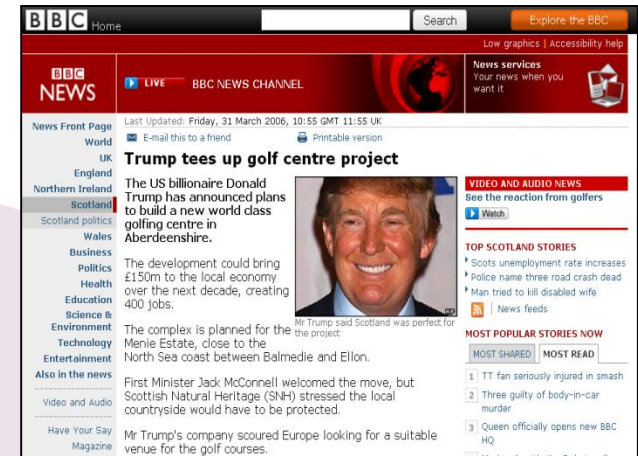


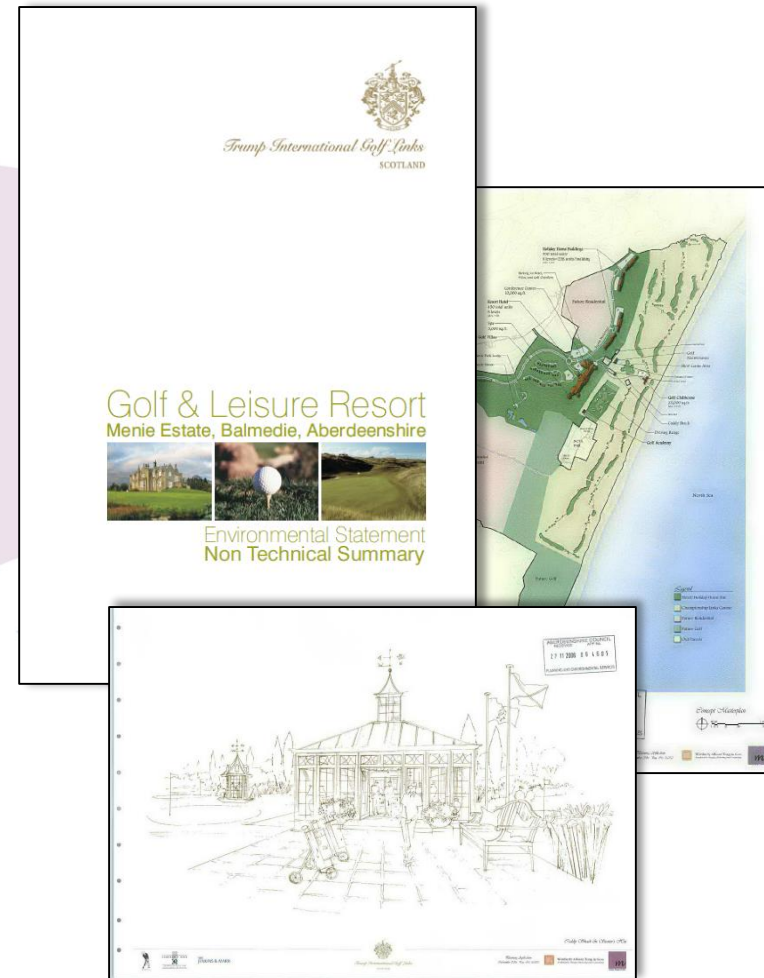
Image: Ramblers Scotland



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Planning Application and Consultation

- **Nov 2006: Outline planning application submitted (now a £1bn project)**
- **Mar 2007: Full application, including environmental and economic impact assessments submitted**
- **Economic impact: 6,000 construction jobs; 1,200 permanent jobs; £50m p.a. to local economy**
- **Environmental impact: “significant adverse changes” to SSSI, but promised “specific mitigation measures”**
- **All information available online, at council offices and libraries, and at public meetings**
- **By Nov 2007, Aberdeenshire Council received 1,850 letters of support and 1,542 objections**



The Drama Unfolds...

- **Sep 2007: Council planners recommend approval**
- **20 Nov 2007: Local area committee back the plan**
- **29 Nov 2007: Infrastructure committee reject the plan, on chairman's casting vote**
- **4 Dec 2007: Scottish Government 'calls in' the application, because of its "national significance"**
- **Jun 2008: Four-week public inquiry begins in Aberdeen**
- **Nov 2008: Finance Secretary, John Swinney, approves the resort, subject to 46 conditions**

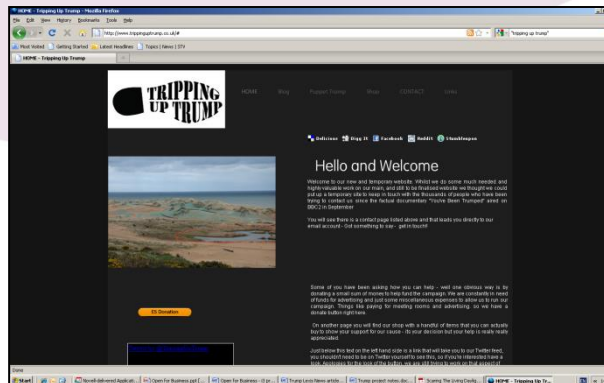


Compulsory Purchase and Tripping Up Trump

- **May 2009: Trump wants to purchase additional pockets of land, including four homes; CPOs to be used as “a last resort”?**
- **Leads to formation of Tripping Up Trump and ‘The Bunker’**
- **Jan 2011: Trump removes threat of CPOs - “We have consistently said that we have no interest in compulsory purchase and have never applied for it”**



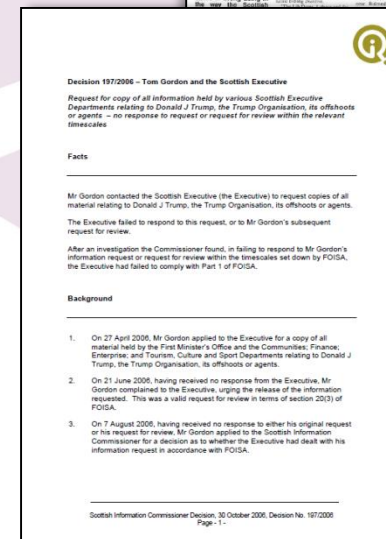
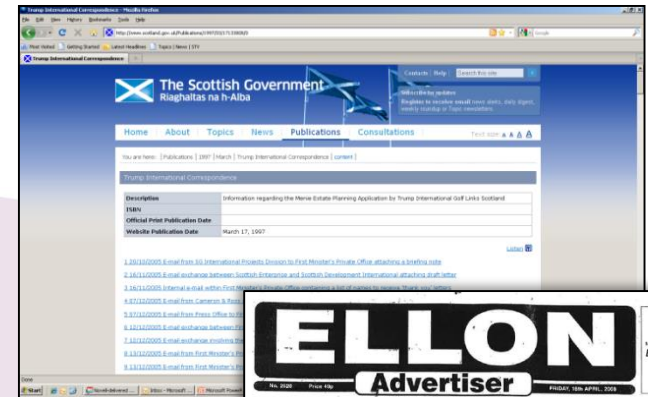
Image: BBC



Source: Aberdeen Voice

Impact of Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

- **Many FOI requests made to Scottish Govt., Aberdeenshire Council and other public bodies, e.g. for:-**
 - correspondence and meetings between First Ministers and Trump and his team
 - Aberdeenshire Council spend on planning experts
 - Grampian Police's relationship with Trump Org.
- ***“Money wasted on a political vendetta”***
(Brian Adam MSP, 2008)
- **Scottish Information Commissioner has made some investigations and decisions relating to Trump development**
- **But doubts remain that ‘everything’ has been released**



Aberdeen Journals: Balanced and Objective?

- Trump's opponents described variously as:
"naysayers and nimbys"
"buffoons in woolly jumpers"
"shiny-eyed saviours of a bit of sand", etc.

- Evening Express:** 'celebrity' trivia

- Press and Journal:** ceased coverage of Tripping Up Trump, because its key figures *"have few links with the North East"*

- Negligible coverage of *You've Been Trumped* (2011) documentary film

- Reasons? - Advertising Revenue? Others?

Circulation	1973	2012	% Drop
P&J	108,000	67,000	-38%
EE	76,000	41,000	-46%



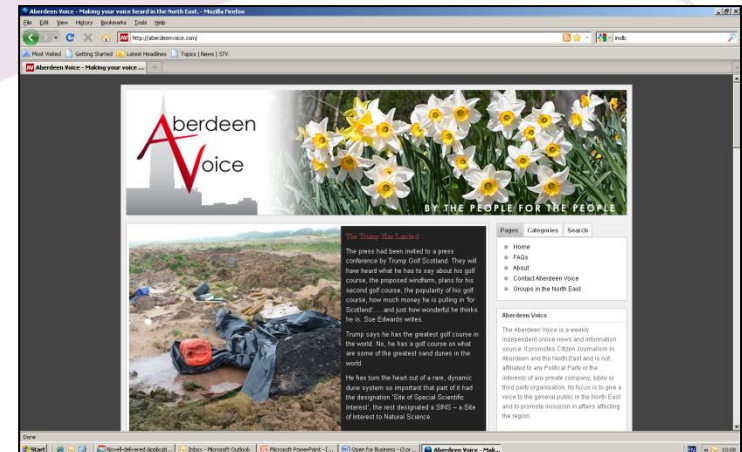
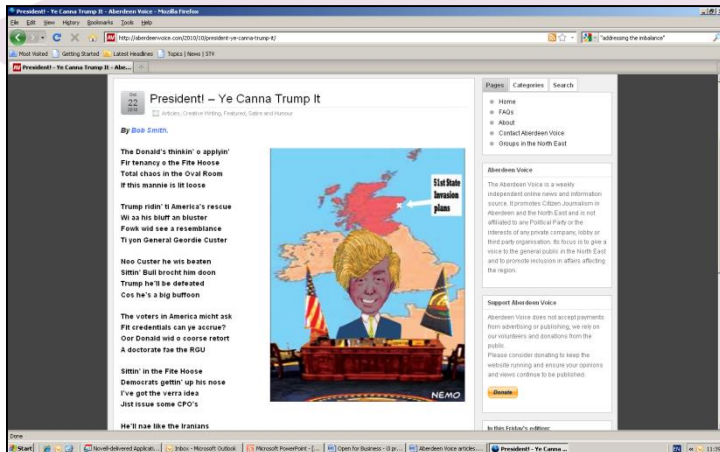
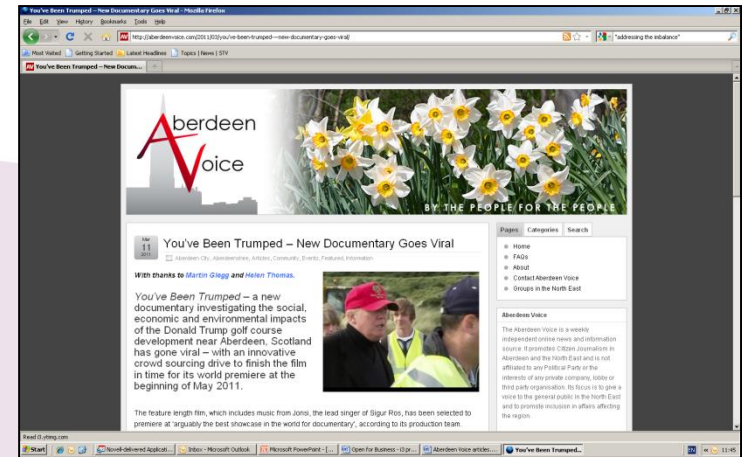
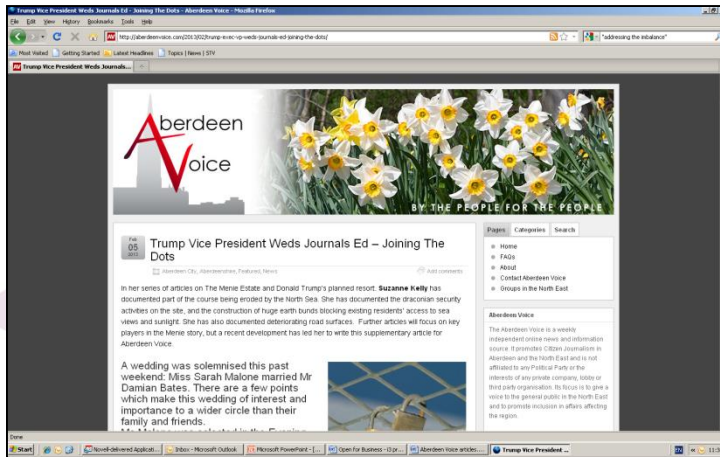
Image: IMDb



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Emergence of Citizen Journalism

Aberdeen Voice (Launched June 2010)



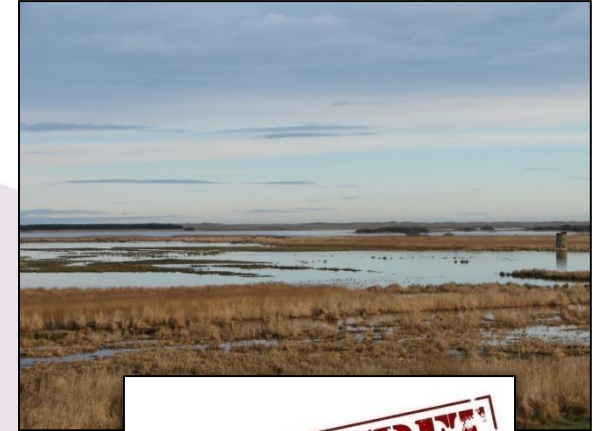
“The Great Dunes of Scotland”: the Current Situation

- **First course opened July 2012**
- **Second course currently being designed**
- **But rest of resort put on hold because of offshore wind farm plans (granted consent by Scottish Government in March 2013)**



Conclusions: (More) Open for Business in 2013?

- **‘Official’ planning information and participative opportunities now more readily available**
- **But question marks remain over its accuracy and comprehensiveness**
- **Readers of regional press less well-informed than in 1970s**
- **Partly counterbalanced by citizen journalism and by online presence of environmental and other interest groups?**
- **Will more information emerge in 15 years?**



TOP SECRET

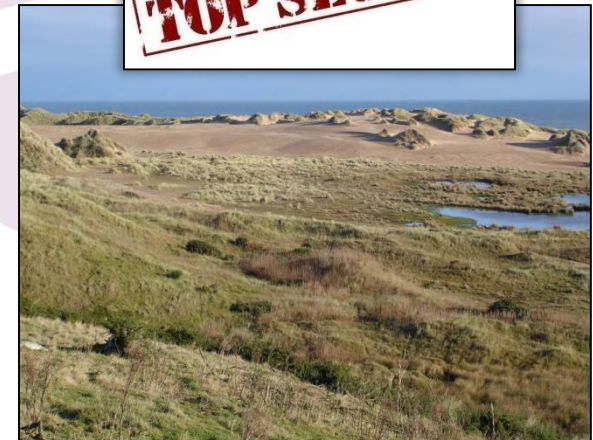


Image: SNH



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Thank You...

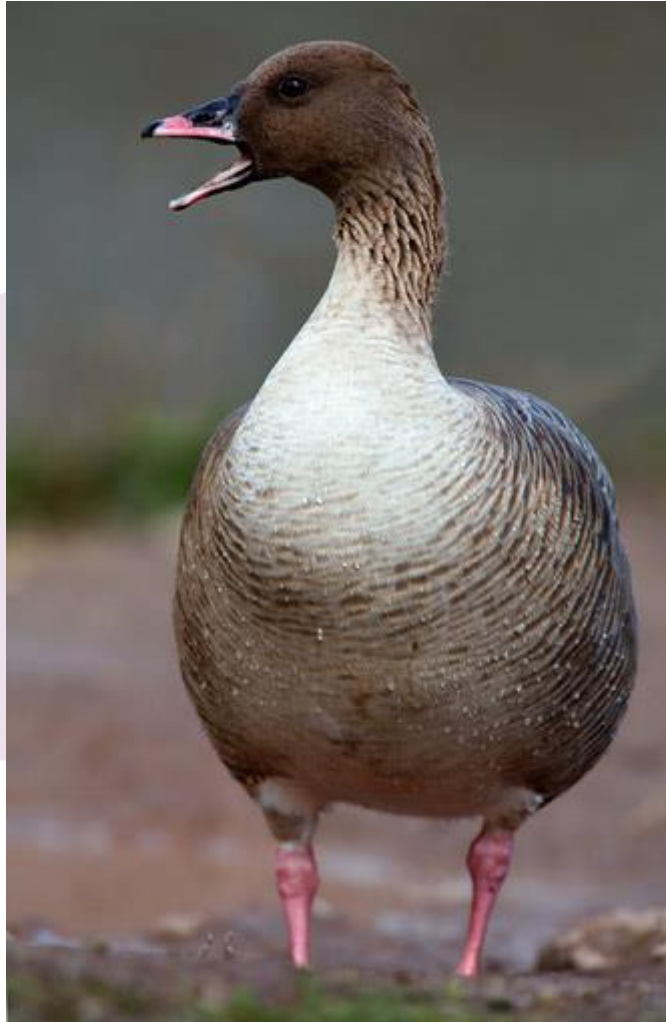


Image: Animal Spot



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